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Senate

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God, our refuge and strength, give us reverence for Your greatness. Guide our Senators around the pitfalls of their work, enabling them to have hearts sustained by Your peace. May they surrender their will to You, as they trust You to direct their steps.

Lord, give them the wisdom to receive Your reproof with the understanding that You chastise those whom You love for their good.

Make their lives productive for the glory of Your Name. And, Lord, bless Ukraine.

We pray in the Name of our redeemer. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS ACT OF 2021—Resumed

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3967, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3967) to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The Senator from Vermont. Mr. LEAHY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

H.R. 3967

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today is a historic, long-awaited day for our Nation's veterans. In a few moments, the Senate is finally going to pass the PACT Act—the most significant expansion of healthcare benefits for our veterans in generations. It is officially called the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring our PACT Act because Heath Robinson was one of the many who succumbed to the poisons of toxins that he was exposed to fighting for America.

For too long, our Nation's veterans have faced an absurd indignity: They enlisted to serve our country, went abroad in good health, and came back, only to get sick from toxic exposure endured while in the line of duty.

As many as 3½ million veterans have been affected by burn pits since 9/11.

Yet approximately 80 percent of all disability claims connected to burn pits have been rejected by the VA. So many of our veterans have been fought by the VA after they fought for us, as they try to get healthcare benefits. Many of them had to hire lawyers just to prove their illnesses and then do a complicated legal dance to show what everyone knew: that toxic exposure from burn pits caused all kinds of cancers and other diseases. That was so, so wrong. Indignity. The callousness of forcing veterans who got sick as they were fighting for us because of exposure to these toxins, to have to fight for years in the VA to get the benefits they deserved—well, that will soon be over, praise God.

To these American heroes who have carried on without the benefits they deserve, I have one thing to say: No more. Today, the Senate finally takes action to right this profound wrong.

The PACT Act will finally change outdated rules at the VA that have been in effect for far too long that prevent our veterans from getting the care they need to treat health complications caused by burn pits. It will expand eligibility for VA medical care to make sure veterans get the help they need.

There is even more good news in the PACT Act. It is not just about burn pits, as important as they are. The PACT Act will expand coverage of health issues exacerbated by Agent Orange, which, over the years, I have strongly pushed for in this Chamber.

I want to give deep thanks to Senators TESTER and MORAN, who worked for months to push this bill over the finish line. Their leadership on this issue has been extraordinary.

I want to thank my colleagues. This is another bipartisan action that is accomplishing something very significant, and I want to thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle who supported the bill through its consideration.

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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Most importantly, I want to thank the many veterans, the veterans service organizations, advocates like Jon Stewart and John Feal, who never gave up on making this change happen. Because of their advocacy, our veterans will finally get the dignity and care they rightfully deserve.

If you want to take the measure of any nation, look no further than the way it treats those who sacrificed everything in the line of duty. Today, the Senate is making sure we treat our heroes the way our heroes deserve to be treated—with dignity, with gratitude for everything they have done to protect our way of life. Gone are the days when veterans will have to struggle to prove and fight to get benefits they deserve.

I thank my colleagues for their work, and I urge all of us to vote yes on this long-overdue legislation.

NOMINATION OF STEVEN M. DETTELBACH

Madam President, now let me talk about something that just happened in the Judiciary Committee.

As we await the completion of the gun safety bill, there is another step the Senate will take today to protect our communities from gun violence. We can move to confirm Steven Dettelbach as the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

I want to thank Senator DURBIN and the Judiciary Committee for moving this nomination expeditiously.

Later today, I will move to discharge the nomination of Mr. Dettelbach from the Judiciary Committee after his nomination resulted in a tie vote. Based on his record and qualifications, Dettelbach unquestionably deserves bipartisan support, but either way, he is going to move forward.

The ATF has not had a permanent Director since 2015, so confirming Mr. Dettelbach is one of my top priorities before the end of June. We need a fully functional, fully staffed ATF in order for that Agency to fulfill its mission of keeping our communities safe from gun violence.

Obviously, the legislation we are talking about that is being negotiated is very important, but so is having a fully functioning ATF. It is critical we have a fully functioning, fully staffed ATF for the Agency to carry out its mission of protecting our communities from gun violence, and what they do is very, very important. Sometimes it is quiet. Sometimes it is not noticed. But their ability to deal with gun traffickers and so many others who poison our streets with illegal guns that take the lives of our children—the ATF is essential in stopping that, curtailing it, and having a strong, qualified nominee like Mr. Dettelbach will certainly help reduce the scourge of gun violence in this country, particularly because the ATF has not had anyone at the helm since 2015. So I am going to make sure his nomination moves as quickly and speedily through this Chamber as possible.

GUN SAFETY

Madam President, now on the other issue, the debate on gun safety, this week, the Senate is making progress on a subject that has frustrated this Chamber for decades: meaningful gun safety legislation.

Last night, I spoke with Senator MURPHY on the latest round of bipartisan negotiations. Both sides met well into the evening and will be meeting again this afternoon. The work is not finished. No one will pretend that has been easy, but both parties are still working towards a final product. I urge both sides to keep going at it. This is so important to the American people. I am hopeful they will come to an agreement on bill text soon.

Once we have the language for a gun safety bill, I am prepared to make it the next legislative matter considered on the Senate floor. We want to move quickly and decisively to make sure we don't let this opportunity slip away.

Just a month ago, very few could have predicted that this Chamber would make as much progress as we have on a gun safety compromise. Given our recent history, it is hard to blame Americans who feel hopeless that change can happen on this issue. But that is why you never give up—never give up—even after facing so many disappointments. No matter how many times gridlock has taken hold in the past, survivors of gun violence, gun safety activists, people who have lost loved ones, children, have fought and fought and fought. They have visited our office every year, many times. Because of them, we are closer to making real progress than we have been in a long, long time.

The work is not done, but I remain hopeful that we are going to get it done, and I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for continuing their work towards a compromise.

JANUARY 6 HEARINGS

Madam President, now on the Big Lie, today, the House will continue its public hearings on the Capitol attack of January 6. I urge all Americans to tune in and listen to the strong case our House colleagues are presenting.

The dangers of the Big Lie transcend the Capitol attack. This week, many hard-right candidates, who deny the 2020 elections and have little faith in the fidelity of our elections, who may well move to undermine them, have won primaries and will be on the ballot in November.

If you want to know what our country could turn into if they win, look at what is happening right now in New Mexico. Right now, a county commissioner in that State is refusing to certify the results of his county's primary elections because of debunked conspiracy theories involving Dominion voting machines. The votes of over 7,000 people are now in jeopardy, and the State supreme court has been compelled to step in. This is the result of the Big Lie spread by Donald Trump.

He cannot accept the fact that he lost. His ego is so huge and infantile that he is undermining American democracy, and too many, often out of fear of Trump and the primary voter acolytes that Trump has, go along with this.

It is happening in too many States. It is a real danger to our democracy. In Nevada, for instance, secretary of state candidate Jim Marchant has said that if he had been in office in 2020, he wouldn't have certified Joe Biden's victory.

That is dangerous stuff. Do my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who go along with this realize that? This undermines the democracy, sacred to all of us—Democrat, Republican, Independent.

America needs to be watching what is happening in States like New Mexico and Nevada because if we are not careful, it will be a preview of greater horrors to come. It is not a partisan argument; it is simply about democracy versus authoritarianism. Many of the things said by some of these officeholders were said by people who then led their country to authoritarian regimes.

It doesn't matter if you are a Democrat or a Republican or an Independent; democracy is at risk if we elevate individuals who don't believe in the sanctity of elections.

I urge the American people, regardless of party, to reject these radicals in November because our democracy is literally—literally—on the line.

OCEAN SHIPPING REFORM ACT

Madam President, finally, on the ocean shipping bill, today is an important day. President Biden will sign the Ocean Shipping Reform Act into law.

Shipping reform is exactly the kind of bill that can make a difference to the American people. It fights inflation. It relieves our supply chains. It will help small businesses and consumers alike.

Our ports need help. The cost of sending a container across the Pacific Ocean is up 1,000 percent. Who pays that? The consumer and the American exporter. Our ports need help. Our supply chains need relief. With today's signing, we can now say help is on the way.

I thank President Biden for signing this bill quickly. I thank my colleagues, Senators KLOBUCHAR, THUNE, and CANTWELL, for their leadership in the Senate. I thank Speaker PELOSI and my House colleagues for approving the bill earlier this week.

I would say to our friends in the media: No, this has been bipartisan. There hasn't been conflict, but it is important. Please pay some attention to it. Things are getting done to deal with the scourge of inflation.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

INFLATION

Mr. McCONNELL. Before Democrats dumped \$2 trillion on the economy last

year, experts warned that such reckless spending would not just raise prices for working families, but could also trigger a full-on recession.

In February of 2021, for example, a prominent economist testified right here on Capitol Hill and said Democrats' runaway spending might back the Federal Reserve into a corner. It might leave the Fed no choice but to sharply raise interest rates. And that would not just slow down our economic recovery, but potentially actually shift it into reverse.

Sound familiar? That is exactly what has happened right before our eyes.

Yesterday, a few days after the far-worse-than-expected inflation report for the month of May, the Fed announced the biggest interest rate hike in 28 years—the biggest interest rate hike in 28 years. And they signal more increases may be on the deck soon. The Fed acted too slowly on the incorrect presumption that inflation would fade away. Now that it hasn't happened, they have to make up for lost time.

The stock markets that carry Americans' retirement savings have been in free fall. The S&P 500 has lost a full one-fifth of its value in just 6 months. Americans' consumer confidence just nose-dived to its lowest point ever recorded—worse than at any point during the 2008 recession, worse than the early panic over COVID.

The percentage of small businessowners who say they are optimistic about the near future has never been this low in the entire 48-year history of that survey. And signs suggest this may be just the beginning of the pain for the American people.

Just 3 months ago, the Fed predicted we would not have to see rising unemployment until 2024. Yesterday, however, they announced they now see unemployment increasing this year, next year, and—and the year after that.

Just between March and May, their official estimate for our country's economic growth in 2022 plummeted—listen to this—by 40 percent. It looks increasingly like Democrats may have driven America toward a full-on recession. They have driven our country toward a full-on recession.

The term "stagflation" was invented to describe the most painful economic conditions for workers and families. It means the worst of three worlds at once: High inflation, slow growth, and rising unemployment. Unless something changes—we all hope it does—this appears to be exactly the trajectory on which Democrats' policies have put our country.

The last time we had a unified Republican government, our policies created low inflation, robust growth, and record-low unemployment. Sole Democratic Party control has produced something quite different.

But, unbelievably, the same Washington Democrats who dug this hole seem unwilling to put away their shovels. They want to keep digging. With our economy trending toward a pos-

sible recession, some of our colleagues are trying to restart discussions about massive trillion-dollar-plus tax hikes.

It really beggars belief. Democrats spent 2021 trying to respond to inflation with even more—even more—reckless spending, and now they are spending 2022 trying to respond to a looming recession with gigantic tax hikes.

This is utter nonsense. It's unbelievable.

Democrats have quite likely inflated their way into a recession, and now they want to pile on historic tax hikes and make it worse.

In every poll, in every survey, the American people make their views of the Democratic economic policies crystal clear. For the sake of the country, let's hope our colleagues remember the first rule of holes, and stop digging.

ENERGY

Madam President, on a related matter, tomorrow President Biden will host the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate. Meanwhile, working Americans will continue to face the consequences of his disastrous energy and climate policies. While President Biden and his team have declared a holy war on America's domestic production, average gas prices have soared over \$5. By August, they are projected to hit \$6.20.

Diesel, which literally drives our economy, is now at an all-time high. Natural gas is up 30.2 percent; fuel oil is up 106.7 percent; groceries, which overwhelmingly rely on diesel semis to get to supermarket shelves, are up nearly 12 percent compared to last year.

These eye-popping numbers are the predictable results of Democrats' inflationary policies and specifically their war on affordable American energy.

Well, the American people continue to tell Democrats they are not interested in buying fantastical green boondoggles when they can barely afford the essentials today. According to one recent poll, more than half of Americans are very or extremely concerned about how grocery prices are affecting their household's financial situation. Nearly two-thirds feel that same way about gas prices.

But Washington Democrats are still in staggering disarray over how and even whether to clean up the mess they have made.

Some, like the administration's climate czar, John Kerry, are still in denial. He said recently: "We absolutely don't"—John Kerry—"We absolutely don't" need to ramp up oil and gas production. Instead, he insisted:

We have to transition to electric vehicles about 20 times faster than we are now.

Americans continue to report that just affording gas has become a daily hardship, but the former Senator from Massachusetts says to folks in places like Kentucky: The solution is just buy an expensive electric car.

Now, some administration officials are willing to acknowledge the problem, just not its source. The American

people continue to hear about a so-called "Putin price hike" even though gas was already up nearly 50 percent—50 percent—since President Biden took office at the time Russia launched the war. Some Members of the President's party seem more clear-eyed. Yesterday, one House Democrat said:

I'm calling on the President to sit down with domestic oil and gas companies and find a way to lower prices. . . . The President needs to bring everyone together.

That was a Democrat in the House.

But, unfortunately, the Biden administration still appears to be jaw-droppingly naive about the consequences of its war on affordable domestic energy. As energy prices continued to skyrocket earlier this year, the White House reportedly insisted the production could just be turned back on with the flip of a switch.

According to one analyst:

They thought shale oil production could grow sharply in the near term—like in a matter of months or quarters . . . They were shocked to learn that that's like asking for blood from a stone.

Of course, Democrats' misunderstanding hasn't stopped them from trying to use American energy producers as a scapegoat. Yesterday, the White House press secretary insisted: "We have done our part . . ." she said. "We need [oil companies] to act."

Really? That doesn't pass the laugh test.

In a letter yesterday, one of America's biggest domestic producers asked the Biden administration for three things: "Clear and consistent policy that supports U.S. resource development", "regular and predictable lease sales", and "support for infrastructure such as pipelines."

Notice that this is precisely a summary of what President Biden hasn't—has not been doing since he took office.

Since day one, the Biden administration has been outright hostile to U.S. resource development, frozen certain new development leases, and canceled a pipeline project that would have expanded efficient energy transport and created American jobs.

The American people are bracing for a very pricey summer, from the gas pump to the grocery store. And they know exactly who to blame.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I recently read an article published by a woman who is very credible on the issue of energy, which I would like to share after the statements recently made by the Republican leader.

The question is whether or not our production of crude oil during President Biden's Presidency was higher or lower than the Trump administration. I quote Heather Cox Richardson:

To encourage production, Biden's officials have issued more permits on federal lands than were issued in the Trump administration's first three years, at a pace that approaches [that of] George W. Bush's administration. Only 10% of all U.S. drilling takes place on federal land, but the Bureau of Land

Management confirms that more than 9,000 drilling permits on public land are currently approved. Not all would be productive if they were developed, and none of them could start producing immediately, but this undercuts the argument that gas prices are high because the Biden administration has choked off permits.

She goes on to say:

What appears to be driving U.S. gas prices is the pressure investors are putting on oil companies, whose officers answer to their investors. Limited production creates higher prices that are driving record profits. In a March 2022 survey of 141 U.S. oil producers asking them why they were holding back production, 59 percent said they were under investor pressure. Only 6 percent blamed “government regulations” for their lack of increased production.

Oil companies are seeing huge profits and are using the money for stock buybacks to raise stock prices. BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, TotalEnergies, Eni, and Equinor will give between \$38 and \$41 billion to shareholders through buyback programs this year.

That is a little different picture than was just painted by the Republican leader.

There is some culpability here when it comes to the oil companies, and blaming President Biden is ignoring the fact that he has, on Federal lands, which, as written, account for a percentage of our production in this country, expanded permits beyond the levels offered by the previous administration. This is certainly a more complex issue than was suggested by the Senator from Kentucky.

GUN LEGISLATION

Mr. President, on another topic, I would say that we have learned a lot from COVID-19. We have learned that this particular pandemic targeted, more than ever, those among us who were up in years, the seniors. They were the most vulnerable to the attack of COVID-19, and many folks in their senior years were threatened by and some succumbed to this terrible pandemic. We knew that it was a problem for senior citizens and still do.

Yesterday, we had a hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee that called to mind the real question before us: What if this pandemic had targeted our children and babies? What if we knew that the next pandemic was going to make them particularly vulnerable? Well, I will tell you, I believe this country—rightly so—would rally behind an effort to do everything we could to protect our children from this looming, potential, cause of death.

Mine is only a hypothetical when it comes to pandemics, but it is not a hypothetical when it comes to the No. 1 cause of death among children and teenagers in America. The CDC, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, just announced within the last 2 weeks that the No. 1 cause of death is not a pandemic but guns, firearms, gun violence, and gun deaths.

Yesterday, we held a hearing in the Judiciary Committee on the leading

cause of death for children in America—guns. In 2020—the most recent year’s statistics that are available—more than 4,300 American babies, children, and teens died from gunfire. During the hearing, we heard from a chorus of witnesses: healthcare witnesses, law enforcement, community violence prevention. They agreed on one basic thing: that gun violence is traumatizing an entire generation of American youth. Lawmakers in Congress have a responsibility to stem this tide of violence.

One of the witnesses was a young college student from Northeastern University in Boston. He actually grew up on the West Side of Chicago. His name is Ernest Willingham. He isn’t 20 years old yet, but his testimony sounded like the testimony of a person who was wise in years. He has already experienced one gun-related tragedy after another.

Mr. Willingham told the members of our committee:

I have seen my brother, my father, my cousin and my best friend become victims of gun violence. . . . This is something that young people should never have to prepare themselves for, yet it remains the lived experience of so many children and youth around our nation.

He continued:

We are better than this as a country, and we can solve this crisis.

Then he made reference to one basic fact. He said:

Most kids who grew up with me spent more time attending funerals than weddings.

That is a sobering statement, and it puts into perspective not only the threat of gun violence and the toll that it has taken but also the trauma that is visited on so many who are affected by this gun violence. We think instantly of the families of the victims, but trauma goes far beyond that; it extends to families of witnesses and to so many others whose lives are affected.

Two weeks ago, in Chicago, Lurie Children’s Hospital convened a group of young people from gun-infested neighborhoods. They agreed to meet with me on a private, off-the-record basis. We closed the door, and I looked at their 20 or 30 faces and said:

Tell me what I need to know as a U.S. Senator about what it means to grow up in your neighborhood.

I can tell you that there was an outpouring of statements from every one of them, talking about how guns have become such a sad and tragic part of their lives and how many of them had either been shot or had lost a family member or a loved one or a friend to gun violence. And they talked about the basics.

One young man said:

Senator, we need home training.

I said:

What do you mean by “home training”?

He said:

We need parents to tell us what is right and wrong, to tell us what to do. There are no rules. The only rules I find are the rules of the gang’s on the street. I know what

their rules are, but I don’t know what the rules are in terms of my own life.

I think back on my childhood. Rules? Oh, I had plenty of rules, and most kids do: Clean your plate. Clean your room. Do your homework. Take out the trash. Walk the dog.

The rules were coming at me all the time. Then I went and attended Catholic grade schools, and, believe me, they had even more rules to play by.

The statements by many of these young people were that their lives were adrift in the earliest stages. Some of it reflects parents who are facing poverty, who are struggling to make ends meet. Some are working two jobs just to get enough money to keep food on the table. They can’t be at home and nurturing and guiding these young people as much as they should because they are struggling from paycheck to paycheck. That is a reality of poverty in these neighborhoods.

Some families aren’t that “lucky”—and I use that in quotes. Some are dysfunctional. They have one parent who is a drug addict and another parent who is inclined toward violence or alcohol, and the child suffers as a result of it.

The point I am getting to is this: That hearing yesterday on gun violence highlighted the reality of what life is like for too many kids in places around America, and it highlighted the importance of doing something.

We had a doctor there who was the chairman of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She said that she sent out an email, in preparation for her testimony, to a number of pediatricians and said:

Can you share with me any personal experiences with kids who are victims of gun violence?

She received 300 replies, which we put in the record of the Senate Judiciary Committee’s. They were sobering statements by doctors of what they faced with kids who had either been victims of gun violence or who had witnessed it and were trauma victims as a result. That was the reality.

Ernest Willingham, whom I mentioned earlier, talked about what it meant to have this as an integral part of his life while growing up. He was one of the lucky ones. He was able to break free from this terrible experience and really start down the path toward a college education.

We had the chief of police from Phoenix, AZ, Chief Williams, who came in. She is a 23-year veteran of the police force and is the chief in a major city. She talked about guns and kids and what they face in her city, where she just recently had a number of her policemen who were injured in the line of duty.

She spoke to that and said:

Last night, there was a shooting, and luckily they survived or I wouldn’t be here today.

That is the reality of guns in America.

We focused with her on the guns like AR-15s that are showing up at these

shootouts and massacres. The AR-15 is a “semiautomatic” weapon, which means it fires ammunition every time you pull the trigger, but it can be converted into an automatic weapon, whereby you can hold the trigger, and it just sprays ammunition at people who are victims.

How many of these exist in the United States today, these AR-15 assault weapons that we are seeing in so many of these massacres and shootings? We are not sure. It is somewhere between 10 and 20 million—10 and 20 million.

I asked the pediatrician what kind of damage is done by these guns, and she told us: It is devastating.

Some of the stories that are coming back from these mass shootings now are horrific. I just even hesitate to repeat them, but they have been reported widely in the news—the damage that is done to these poor little bodies in the classrooms when these weapons are turned on them.

Now, there is no earthly purpose for such a weapon other than their use in the military—it isn’t used for sport; it isn’t used for hunting; it can’t be used for self-defense very effectively—but so many, millions, are being sold across America.

From my point of view, we should be dealing with that issue directly, as well as high-capacity magazines that allow these to happen, but, unfortunately, we can’t at this moment. We don’t have the political will to do it in the U.S. Senate—50-50 divided. We do have the will to take up the framework, which is being worked on at this very moment. It isn’t what I want to see, and it isn’t what many of us want to see, but it is a step forward.

I commend the Senators—the Democrat CHRIS MURPHY and the Republican JOHN CORNYN—for assembling a group of some 20 Senators, Democrats and Republicans, who are working on this legislation. It is critically important that they are successful. I know they are having drafting challenges—that is common around here—but we have plenty of talented people, and if the Members, in good will, sit down, they can work out their differences. I urge them to do so.

Senator SCHUMER and Senator MCCONNELL publicly support this undertaking. It is one of the rare bipartisan events in the U.S. Senate, and it is on the critical issue of gun safety. I hope that by next week, we can consider this on the floor.

NOMINATION OF STEVEN M. DETTELBACH

Mr. President, there is another matter that will come before us as soon as today, and it was a matter that was raised in the Judiciary Committee this morning.

Today, we can start by discharging from the committee a proven, battle-tested leader to head the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. His name is Steve Dettelbach. The Presiding Officer knows him well as he served as a member of his staff as

a detailee. He has an exceptional record.

You see, it has been 7 years since there has been a Senate-confirmed Director at ATF, and at a moment when guns are killing our kids at a devastating rate, this office cannot remain vacant any longer—7 years.

How many times have you heard the statement: “We don’t need any gun laws. We just need to enforce the laws that are already on the books”? Well, one of the Agencies that have major jurisdiction is Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

It is no coincidence since it has been 7 years since there has been a person in charge of that Agency. You need someone to guide the Agency to enforce the laws to keep our streets safe. That is very basic.

Well, we made a gesture toward that this morning in the Senate Judiciary Committee. Today, we voted for discharge. The Senate will take a critical step toward confirming Mr. Dettelbach. He is the kind of leader our Nation needs to get a handle on the crisis of gun violence. Later today, we will have a vote on the floor here. I hope we can get bipartisan support for Mr. Dettelbach.

Members of law enforcement, mayors across America, and former Federal prosecutors all agree that it is time that this man, Steve Dettelbach, become the Director of the ATF. More than 140 former Justice Department officials, including multiple Trump administration appointees, have stepped forward to voice their support for Mr. Dettelbach’s nomination. The Judiciary Committee has also received letters of support from multiple former Directors and Acting Directors of the ATF.

It is no surprise. As a career prosecutor, Mr. Dettelbach has devoted decades of his life to working alongside law enforcement, including ATF agents, to combat gang violence, gun crimes, and hate crimes. In every role he has held, Mr. Dettelbach has been squarely focused on protecting the lives of law enforcement officers and the families they serve.

In his own words:

Politics can play no role in law enforcement.

He has earned the trust of an amazing list of law enforcement organizations. Listen to the groups that support his taking on this job: The National Sheriffs’ Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Major County Sheriffs of America, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, Women in Federal Law Enforcement, the Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association, and many, many more.

When a mass shooter tears apart a community like Buffalo, NY, or Uvalde, TX, ATF agents are among the first Federal officers to respond. Let us not wait a minute longer in providing these heroic agents the leader they de-

serve. Yes, let’s enforce the laws that are on the books. Let’s put together the leadership of the ATF to make certain that is done.

I hope my colleagues will join me in voting for Steve Dettelbach’s confirmation on the floor of the Senate today. It is timely, it is important, and it is long overdue.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. BOOKER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes, Senator MORAN for up to 7 minutes, and Senator TESTER for up to 10 minutes prior to the scheduled rollcall votes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

U.S. ARMY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, before I begin, I would like to take a brief moment to wish the U.S. Army a happy 247th birthday.

I had the special honor this morning to “fall in” with Secretary of the Army Wormuth, Army Chief of Staff McConville, Sergeant Major of the Army Grinston, many other Army leaders, and hundreds of soldiers for some morning PT.

I appreciated the opportunity to join in the Army tradition of a birthday formation run, and it was especially humbling to run through the hallowed grounds of Arlington National Cemetery.

Any time you are in Arlington—or any national cemetery in the States, like the Black Hills National Cemetery in South Dakota, or overseas, like the Normandy American Cemetery—you are reminded of the sacrifice and legacy of our Nation’s warfighters. Every name and pair of dates on a headstone tells a unique story of selfless service to our Nation.

In running over the hills and around the turns this morning, you get a better sense of the magnitude of the more than 400,000 Americans who are honored at Arlington and the collective sacrifice of all of America’s heroes.

Today, the U.S. Army proudly carries on the heritage and legacy established on June 14, 1775. Our soldiers and all our men and women in uniform stand guard around the world to protect our freedoms, and they make any adversary think twice about threatening them, as the U.S. Army has done for the past 247 years.

Thank you for all of your service to our country, your professionalism, and determination, and thank you for including me today. Happy birthday to the U.S. Army.

RURAL BROADBAND

Mr. President, as a longtime member and former chairman of the Senate

Commerce Committee and as a resident of a rural State, I have long been focused on expanding rural broadband access and ensuring that the benefits of the next wave of mobile broadband, 5G, are fully realized in rural communities.

Expanding rule broadband access has been embraced by Members on both sides of the aisle, and Congress has appropriated billions of dollars in recent years to ensure that rural communities are able to access fixed broadband. It is encouraging to see Members on both sides of the aisle supporting this goal, but there are problems. While, as I said, Congress has appropriated billions of dollars toward this goal, the Federal Government lacks an overarching broadband strategy.

As a recent Government Accountability Office report highlighted, rural broadband funding is spread out over 15 separate Agencies and more than 130 separate programs in our government. That doesn't exactly make for outstanding efficiency or coordination. What it does make for is wasted taxpayer dollars and slower progress in ensuring that our rural communities have access to broadband.

Last week, the Senate Commerce Committee's Communications Subcommittee, of which I serve as ranking member, held an oversight hearing on one of the leading Agencies charged with expanding rural broadband access and promoting wireless access, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, or the acronym is NTIA. I appreciated Assistant Secretary Davidson coming to testify before the committee.

Last year, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which provided billions of dollars to NTIA to deploy broadband services to unserved areas throughout the United States. At the time the bill was debated, I raised a number of concerns about NTIA's ability to effectively and efficiently manage such substantial funding, given NTIA's past history on expanding rural broadband services. The last time Congress provided NTIA with broadband funding—a fraction, I might add, of the funding it is now responsible for—the Agency struggled with implementation and ended up overbuilding existing broadband networks, resulting in billions of taxpayer dollars being spent with little to show. And I have to say, I have not seen a lot to convince me that NTIA will do a better job this time around.

Last month, NTIA released its Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment—or BEAD—Program. The notice contains a number of troubling components. To begin with, I am concerned that NTIA is planning to base its funding allocations on maps that don't accurately reflect which areas of the country are unserved. This creates a substantial risk of misallocating the funding Congress appropriated and, once again, overbuilding existing networks at the taxpayers' expense.

NTIA's notice also makes clear that when it comes to expanding networks, they are planning to favor certain applicants; specifically, government-run networks and nontraditional broadband providers—entities with no proven track record in deploying broadband networks.

What NTIA should be doing is taking a neutral approach that allows equal participation from all types of broadband providers, as long as they meet the technical, financial, and operational standards to deploy networks.

Finally, especially at a time of record high inflation, the last thing any Agency should be doing is pursuing extraneous political goals that will ultimately increase the cost for providers who are deploying networks. I am disappointed that NTIA, like other Federal Agencies under this administration, is seeking to score political points with certain constituencies—in this case, by leaning into net neutrality requirements, promoting burdensome labor standards, and focusing upon climate change initiatives.

NTIA's focus on requiring broadband providers to use a unionized workforce or project labor agreement not only puts providers that do not use union workforces at a disadvantage, but it is unworkable—unworkable—for providers in rural communities like those in South Dakota that simply don't have access to a unionized workforce.

Earlier this month, I heard firsthand from the folks who are building out networks in my home State of South Dakota about the challenges they face with respect to supply chain shortages and increased construction costs, and including unnecessary requirements in broadband contracts will only exacerbate that problem.

I will continue to urge NTIA to work with States to reduce, rather than increase, regulatory burdens so that the funding Congress provided could be used to provide broadband access to as many Americans as possible.

I also continue to work on other measures to expand broadband access in rural communities, including the Reforming Broadband Connectivity Act, which I joined colleagues from both parties to introduce last year.

This legislation will help guarantee a stable funding stream for the Federal Communication Commission's Universal Service Fund, which promotes universal access to broadband and other telecommunications services. And I am hoping—I am hoping—we can get this legislation enacted into law this year.

Having reliable rural fixed broadband services is also key in ensuring that rural communities are able to access the next wave of mobile broadband internet, 5G, and I am committed to smoothing the path for 5G services.

Mr. President, 5G offers tremendous potential for rural communities, whether it is better access to telehealth or the opportunity to implement precision agriculture. And we

need to ensure that we build out 5G networks not just in cities and in suburbs but in rural communities across the United States.

I have introduced a number of bills to help keep the United States at the forefront of the 5G revolution and ensure that 5G technology makes its way to rural communities.

My STREAMLINE Act, for example, would expedite the deployment of the small cells that are needed for 5G installation, while respecting the role of State and local governments in making deployment decisions. And, importantly, it would make it more affordable to bring 5G to rural areas by addressing the costs of small cell deployment.

On the spectrum side of the equation, this year, I introduced the Spectrum Innovation Act, along with the Communications Subcommittee chair, Senator LUJÁN, to free up additional midband spectrum for 5G deployment, an action that will simultaneously improve 5G coverage and bring in revenue for deficit reduction.

Since freeing up additional spectrum requires proper coordination between NTIA, the FCC, and other Federal Agencies, I joined Senators WICKER, BLACKBURN, and LUJÁN to introduce the Improving Spectrum Coordination Act to ensure that our Federal partners are effectively managing our Nation's airwaves.

On the workforce side of things, my Telecommunications Skilled Workforce Act, which was enacted into law last year, is designed to help increase the number of workers enrolled in 5G training programs and identifying ways to grow the telecommunications workforce to meet the demands of 5G.

I will continue to work to support every part of the 5G equation—from physical technology to spectrum, to a 5G workforce—so that the United States can stay at the forefront of this internet revolution. I will also continue to make fixed broadband and 5G access in rural communities a priority.

Too often, rural areas, like those in my home State of South Dakota, have lagged behind when it comes to getting the most modern internet technology, and I am committed to ensuring that the full benefits of next-generation technologies make their way to rural communities.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

H.R. 3967

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, thank you for that emphatic recognition.

In the next few minutes, the Senate will vote on the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022.

This is a significant—I would say historic—moment. This bipartisan legislation, not only is it significant and important because of the content, but it is also significant and perhaps historic because of the cooperation that has

been garnered to put this act together and presumably pass it and send it to the President of the United States.

This bipartisan legislation is the most comprehensive toxic exposure package the Senate has ever delivered to veterans in our country's history.

Generation after generation, Americans, one by one, have answered the call of duty with the promise that we—the United States of America, the citizens of this country—would take care of them and their families after their time in uniform. Yet generation after generation, veteran after veteran, these servicemembers returned home only to be met with a piecemeal process as they work to cobble together the care that they earned and the benefits they deserved from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veterans have spent years fighting bureaucracy to get the care they need, and, sadly, there are those who have been fighting, up to this point, who are no longer living, to receive the benefits that this legislation will provide.

Chairman TESTER, the Senator from Montana, and I made a commitment to get to this point today. I am proud that we are doing so together in a bipartisan way. And, most importantly, this bill will deliver healthcare and benefits to thousands of veterans who are ill due to their exposure to burn pits and other toxic exposures.

There is no doubt that the cost of taking care of our veterans is high, but the truth is freedom is not free. We say that. This is evidence that we believe that, upon the passage of this legislation.

There is always, always a cost to war. It is always high. It is always dramatic. It is always something that costs people their lives. But we make a decision when we send those service men and women to war that we are going to do what we said we are going to do and care for them. The decision is made when we send someone to war about whether we are going to spend money to care for them when they return. The cost of war is not fully paid when the war is over.

We are now on the verge of honoring that commitment to America's veterans and their families. Back home in Kansas, MG Lee Tafanelli said this legislation "will have a great impact in the lives of our veterans long after their service. The knowledge that the obstacles formerly in their way have now been streamlined will provide peace of mind as our veterans move on with their lives."

I spoke on Memorial Day at a cemetery in Kansas, and a Navy veteran came up to me after my remarks and said: I served in the Navy. My dad served in the Navy. We both encountered toxic substances, and we are fortunate we have no symptoms that cause any problems in our lives, but that doesn't mean we don't think about it every day; that what happens if we do have those consequences in the future and there is nothing there for us

and, more importantly, for our families.

This legislation helps provide some level of certainty. I am sure every member of our service, when they serve our Nation, recognizes they run risks, but I doubt that any of them believe that they are creating risks for their spouses or their children. They carry the burden for themselves, but there is also the necessity of caring for their families, particularly if they get to a point at which they cannot do so.

Not only will this legislation provide long-overdue healthcare and benefits to the 3.5 million post-9/11 veterans who were exposed to burn pits, but this legislation will deliver care for all generations of veterans, including Vietnam veterans suffering from exposure to Agent Orange.

I am at an age at which it would seem like the Vietnam war was a long time ago and we would have taken care of those who served, but we have those who served in Vietnam who are still waiting for their benefits.

The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson PACT Act would not be on the floor today without the hard work of numerous veterans service organizations, veteran families, survivors, advocates, and the veterans themselves who came to Washington to meet with Senator TESTER and with me and with every Member of the U.S. Senate, to have a conversation, to tell their story. And they are the most effective advocates there could be. And many of them, and others, testified before our Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

This legislation is not just a product of Senator TESTER's and mine; it is a product of so many. It is so much more. And perhaps—no offense to Senator TESTER, but perhaps our role is really insignificant when you look at the people who have encountered these challenges but used those challenges as an opportunity to fight not just for themselves but, in most instances, probably more likely to fight for other veterans in similar circumstances.

I thank them for their service. I thank them for their work in helping us deliver long-lasting solutions and comprehensive reforms for those who served. And I especially want to thank Heath Robinson's family, who turned their own loss and heartache into action. This bill will help many veterans like Heath face the challenges that he faced that ultimately ended his life.

I thank Senator TESTER, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. And for all the members of our committees, Republicans and Democrats, I remind my colleagues and I remind the American people that the original version of this bill passed the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee unanimously, with every Republican and every Democrat voting yes.

After the passage of that legislation, we worked further to find consensus but, more importantly, to find better solutions and a path forward that would allow us to be to the point we

are today. Secretary McDonough deserves our gratitude as well, and I thank him for his input, his testimony, and the numerous, numerous telephone and personal conversations. I appreciate his advice, and it made this bill better for veterans.

Once we pass this legislation, the real work of implementing it will fall to the Department of Veterans Affairs. But we as a committee and we as Senators need to make certain that we do the appropriate oversight, that we make certain that these are not just words on paper but that the results that we are looking for are finally delivered.

Too often, I think, the moment of glory comes on the passage of a bill or the press release announcing the passage of a bill, the signing of a bill, but whether or not it works still remains the most important aspect of our work. A lot of work remains, and the VA has significant challenges as it moves forward to help these veterans. The real work is still ahead of us, and I stand ready to do all I can to make certain that we are able to deliver the intended results contemplated by this legislation.

A long list of thank-yous to my colleagues, certainly to my colleagues on the committee, my colleagues in the Senate, but especially to folks in the VA community, the VSO community: Shane Liermann, Lawrence Montreuil—Shane is with the DAV; Lawrence is with the American Legion—Pat Murray with the VFW; Kristina Keenan, VFW; Cory Titus, MOAA; Aleks Morosky, WWP; Candace Wheeler, TAPS; Bob Carey, Independence Fund; Tom Porter, IAVA; Kaitlynn Hetrick, IAVA; Jennifer Burch, IAVA; Rosie Torres, Burn Pits 360; Jon Stewart; and Jon Feal.

And I thank the Kansas leaders who, over a long period of time—I don't know what year it was, but the Vietnam Veterans of America held a conference in Wichita, KS, which I attended, at which the topic was toxic exposure. And it has to be at least 10, 12 years ago. And I thank them for, at that point in time, sticking in my mind that there is work to be done.

And I appreciate other Kansans: Lee Hursey, who is the commander of the Kansas VFW; Jeremy Ehart of the Kansas American Legion; William Turner; Eric Owens; Lee Tafanelli; David Dennis; GEN Mike Dodson; Pat Proctor; Paul Chapa; COL Timothy Marlar; and COL John Buckley, all of whom are Kansans who are working on behalf of other veterans in our State to see that we get this right.

And nothing in this body gets done because Senators do all the work. Senators have ideas and occasionally a few words here and there, but we are surrounded by people who every day make those words and those thoughts come to life on a piece of paper called a bill. And my staff on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and in my office have been unending in their efforts to

get this right and to work to find an agreement that could become law. Lindsay Dearing leads that list; Asher Allman; Michele Payne; Tiffanii Woolfolk; Emily Blair Rubright; Kelsey Baron; Brian Newbold; Mark Crowley; Emily Brady; Brian Mann; David Shearman; and our leader, Jon Towers; and Tom Brandt; Angela Lingg; and Miranda Moore. And as to Senator TESTER, Tony McClain, his chief; and Simon Coon.

I appreciate the opportunity to be on the Senate floor at this moment for what I hope will be a resounding victory not for Senator TESTER, not for JERRY MORAN but for the veterans of America who served our Nation admirably, did what they were asked to do, and encountered things they should not have encountered, the consequences of which have lasted throughout their lives. We are here to fulfill a commitment and a promise, and we begin that, we move forward on that today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator MORAN for his comments. I didn't hear everything he had to say, but when I came in, one of the things he said was we may not be the most important people in this process. And he is 100 percent correct. We are simply the conduit that was utilized to get this bill put into law.

There are way, way too many people to thank on this legislation, and I am going to get to that. And I will forget a bunch of folks, and I apologize right now.

But the truth is, we today, the U.S. Senate today, has the opportunity to make history by passing the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics—PACT—Act.

This is not a new issue. Generations after generations of Americans have gone to war backed by a promise that we made to them when they signed up that we would care for them when they got home. Unfortunately, that didn't happen in the case of toxic exposure. We failed them.

This bill is about righting a wrong that has been ignored for just way too damn long. It is about Will Thompson. It is about SFC Heath Robinson. It is about every American who has lost their lives through toxic exposures because of the duty that they have performed for this country.

Sadly, it is too late to do right by Will and Heath and so many others, but today, this body has a chance to do the right thing by their families and future generations of our All-Volunteer military by passing the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our PACT Act.

The days of ignoring the wounds from toxic exposure, wounds not seen until years after those days are gone—conditions like hypertension and MGUS found in veterans like Robert

Hunter, a proud Montanan who served in the Army as an engineering officer during the Vietnam war. Robert was exposed to Agent Orange during his service and contracted MGUS years later. He is one of the 66,000 veterans in Montana who would become eligible for relief under this bill—not to mention every post-9/11 veteran in this country who would automatically receive VA healthcare. This includes more than 3.5 million post-9/11 combat veterans exposed to burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This bill would also remove the burden of proof for 23 presumptive conditions caused by military toxic exposures, from cancers to lung disease, and it would codify a more transparent framework to establish future presumptions of service connections to ensure future generations of veterans are treated more fairly than the last. And probably, most importantly, it will allow the VA to make the decisions on toxic exposures instead of an act of Congress.

In short, the PACT Act will allow hundreds of thousands of veterans across the country to access the VA care that they have been denied and give them the benefits that they have earned. Make no mistake, the VA will be given the tools it needs to hire more medical professionals and claims processors, establish more healthcare facilities and improve claims processing, ensuring we are meeting the needs of our veterans today, tomorrow, and in the future.

The bottom line is this country is very capable of recognizing the physical, obvious wounds of war—a lost limb, a chemical burn—and we are taking the steps to recognize the mental wounds of war, but we haven't been recognizing the toxic wounds of war, and that will end today with the passage of this bill.

As chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee—and I have said this many times to the veterans service organizations—I take my cues from them, the veterans they represent. When I first introduced the COST of War Act last year, together we set out with a clear goal, a goal to right the wrongs of decades of inactions and failure—by us, by our government—to provide all areas of toxic-exposed veterans the VA care and benefits they need and that they have earned.

We knew this was the only way to do this—was to put forth a package that took care of our past, present, and future veterans. I am grateful—and I mean this because folks always talk about good friends on the Senate floor. Sometimes, they mean it; sometimes, they don't. I mean it. Thank you to my good friend Ranking Member JERRY MORAN for working with me, with the committee, for creating an environment so our staffs could work together to create this new, bipartisan toxic exposure strategy.

And for my colleagues on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, particu-

larly my friends like Senator JOHN BOOZMAN and Senator SHERROD BROWN, thank you.

I am thankful for the leadership of President Biden and VA Secretary Denis McDonough, along with House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman TAKANO, and so many, many others who are here today.

This bill is the legislation we envisioned when we set out to right the wrongs of our toxic-exposed vets.

This bill recognizes the cost of war. It is the bill our veterans and our families deserve and are counting on and cannot wait any longer for. Veterans and veterans service organizations and advocates have understood this for a long time. And they have been incredible partners since the beginning, and I look forward to thanking each and every one of them in the days and the weeks to come.

I want to speak directly to them now: I am grateful for your efforts. I am grateful for your voices—for never taking your foot off the gas—and continuing to push Members of Congress to simply do the right thing.

I also want to acknowledge the countless hours put in by the staffs from both sides of the aisle—and Senator MORAN is exactly correct, we take credit for their good work; and they do good work—staff from my office, like staff director Tony McClain, as well as this guy right here to my left, Simon Coon, Dahlia Melendrez, James Cho, Janko Mitric, Tess Wrzesinski, Shauna Rust, Olya Voytovich, and Liz Timmons but also folks across the aisle, like Lindsay Dearing, Jon Towers, Asher Allman, Tom Brandt, Pat McGuigan, Michelle Dominguez, Dili Sundaramoorthy, and Mike Jones.

Look, by sitting down in a bipartisan way to get this bill crafted, we were able to have success and get the job done, and that is what the folks who sent us here expect us to do. America's veterans and their loved ones will be better off as a result of this work today, and the result of that will make this country a better place.

There is always a cost of war, and that cost is never fully repaid when the war ends. So I have got one question: Are we willing to show these millions of veterans that we have their back, that the U.S. Government has their back? Are we willing to admit that we didn't live up to the promise of veterans like Will Thompson and Heath Robinson?

But the fact is, I believe today will show that we can put party politics aside and honor America's bravest. We can honor the plea of Heath's 8-year-old daughter Brielle to "Fight for the heroes who fought for our country and pass my dad's bill, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson PACT Act." And we can begin settling our debts to millions of other veterans and their families today.

The last thing is, what I am going to close with, that the work is not over with, assuming this bill passes today.

The ranking member is 100 percent correct: We are going to have a lot of oversight to do to make sure that the veterans get the healthcare and the benefits that they have earned and that they deserve. That is the congressional intent that we have with this bill. So oversight will be critically important.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this is the greatest advance in veterans' healthcare in decades. It wouldn't have happened without JERRY MORAN and the amazing work of Chairman JON TESTER who persisted through so many different turns and twists and difficulties. Every veteran in America, every American, should give tremendous thanks to Senator TESTER and Senator MORAN.

I yield the floor and urge a vote.

VOTE ON H.R. 3967

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, all postcloture time is expired.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill, as amended, pass?

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

The result was announced—yeas 84, nays 14, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 230 Leg.]

YEAS—84

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Murphy
Barrasso	Graham	Murray
Bennet	Grassley	Ossoff
Blackburn	Hagerty	Padilla
Blumenthal	Hassan	Peters
Blunt	Hawley	Portman
Booker	Heinrich	Reed
Boozman	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Braun	Hirono	Rubio
Brown	Hoeven	Sanders
Cantwell	Hyde-Smith	Sasse
Capito	Inhofe	Schatz
Cardin	Johnson	Schumer
Carper	Kaine	Scott (FL)
Casey	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cassidy	Kennedy	Shaheen
Collins	King	Sinema
Coons	Klobuchar	Smith
Cornyn	Leahy	Stabenow
Cortez Masto	Lujan	Sullivan
Cotton	Manchin	Tester
Cramer	Markey	Van Hollen
Cruz	Marshall	Warner
Duckworth	McConnell	Warnock
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Ernst	Merkley	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Moran	Wyden
Fischer	Murkowski	Young

NAYS—14

Burr	Lee	Risch
Crapo	Lummis	Romney
Lankford	Paul	

Rounds	Thune	Toomey
Shelby	Tillis	Tuberville

NOT VOTING—2

Daines	Wicker
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The bill (H.R. 3967) as amended, was passed.

HONORING OUR PACT ACT OF 2021

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the passage of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, or PACT Act, is an example of what can happen when the Congress puts aside partisanship and comes together for the good of the country and, importantly, our veterans.

Each of us, in every State and in every congressional district across the country, has a friend, a neighbor, or a constituent, a veteran, or an Active-Duty servicemember, who has become sick or died from exposure to toxics while serving in the military. And for too many of those people, recognition of the connection between their illnesses and toxic exposures came too late.

Early in my time in the Senate, I heard from Vietnam veterans who were sickened by exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange. Too many of these veterans died before Congress pushed the Department of Veterans Affairs to recognize and treat their illnesses or compensate them for the disability caused by our own government's use of such a toxic substance throughout Vietnam and in other parts of Southeast Asia.

I hoped we would have learned from our mistakes there. I hoped we would learn from the veterans and civilians who suffered from radiation exposure when we tested the atomic bomb. I hoped we would learn from the veterans who came home from the first Gulf War with unexplained illnesses.

But just a few years ago, I watched my dear friend, BG Mike Heston, ravaged by pancreatic cancer, fight for the VA and the Department of Defense to acknowledge that his cancer was caused by exposure to the burn pits that had been used during his tours in Afghanistan.

Mike served as a Vermont State trooper for 26 years and for 33 years in the military, including in the Marine Corps Reserve and the Vermont National Guard. He served his State and his country without question. When he got sick, he should not have had to spend his precious remaining time fighting for the government to acknowledge what caused his illness.

But Mike did fight. Mike fought to ensure that his family, his two wonderful children, Kelsey and Keegan, would be cared for if he succumbed to his illness. He and his wife June also fought to make sure that other veterans would not have to endure what they did, that they might get an earlier diagnosis, that they might not have to spend any of their precious moments fighting for the benefits they earned.

After Mike passed away in 2018, June continued and expanded the fight.

Joining her in Vermont were Staff Sergeant Wesley Black, who died last year of colon cancer at the age of 36, leaving behind his wife Laura and son Ronan; Pat Cram, widow of Sergeant Major Mike Cram, who died of prostate cancer at the age of 47; and many others who through their experience with friends or loved ones were determined to make sure that things would be better for those who followed.

As we stand here today prepared to enact one of the most sweeping packages of veterans benefits and healthcare measures in modern history, I am thinking of Mike and June, of Kelsey and Keegan, of Mike and Pat, and of Wesley and Laura and Ronan. And I know that each Senator voting yes today is thinking of people in their States and districts who are sick or who have died as a result of exposure to toxics while serving our country.

Their stories are meaningful, and they, themselves, ensured that their sacrifice is meaningful, too. And I hope that this time we will learn from our experiences with toxic substances and hold the Department of Defense to a higher standard in the future.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 969, Ana Isabel de Alba, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of California.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Richard Blumenthal, Alex Padilla, Christopher A. Coons, Gary C. Peters, Elizabeth Warren, Mazie Hirono, Tammy Baldwin, Tina Smith, Mark R. Warner, Edward J. Markey, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Martin Heinrich, Jeanne Shaheen, Sherrod Brown, Margaret Wood Hassan.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Ana Isabel de Alba, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of California, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES), the Senator from Mississippi (Mrs. HYDE-